



TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday, February 17, 2022

**Re: Governor's Proposed FY 23 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education
and General Government A Agencies**

H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Caroline Simmons and I am Mayor of the City of Stamford. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you concerning Governor Lamont's proposed FY 23 budget adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education.

As the second largest city in Connecticut, Stamford has experienced incredible growth across all sectors, including in our school district. Stamford Public Schools serves a diverse population of over 16,500 students, providing them with extensive academic and extracurricular activities and programs and a learning experience rich in cultural diversity that prepares them for our global world.

Stamford Public Schools share similar demographics to that of other urban school districts across Connecticut, as well as similar challenges. 14.4 percent of Stamford students are English Language Learners, 14.5% of students are identified with disabilities, and 59.1% of students are eligible for free and reduced priced meals. Despite this, Stamford is ranked 28th in the state's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula, compared to the top five urban school districts, which are ranked in the top five in ECS funding. I encourage the committee to continue to evaluate the funding formula to ensure greater equity across municipalities.

It's critical that students, teachers, and administrators have the resources they need to recover from the emotional and mental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. I'm pleased that Governor Lamont's proposed budget has dedicated funds toward mental health and behavioral health services and I urge the committee to increase funding toward in-school mental health support services and programs.

Additionally, it's positive to see \$90 million in Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds (CSFRF) allocated to support school air quality improvements. Ensuring Stamford receives funding and investments in school infrastructure is one of my top priorities and this funding will go toward updated HVAC systems that are crucial for providing clean air for our students and teachers.

As we continue to navigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, investments toward early childhood, elementary, and secondary education have never been more important. I urge this committee to ensure that the budget passed reflects a commitment to educational equity in public education across Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mayor Caroline Simmons